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LIFE SENTENCE FOR FATAL ARSON

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that Darrel Louis Brooks, age 21, of Baltimore, Maryland was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole today after pleading guilty before United States District Judge Marvin J. Garbis to charges that on October 16, 2002 he used gasoline to deliberately set fire to the residence at 1401 E. Preston Street, Baltimore, Maryland which resulted in the deaths of seven members of the Dawson family -- Angela Dawson, age 36, Carnell Dawson, Sr., age 43, Lawanda Ortiz, age 14, Juan Ortiz, age 12, Carnell Dawson, Jr., age 10, and twin brothers Keith Dawson and Kevin Dawson, ages 9.

Pursuant to his plea agreement, Brooks also admitted to the arson of the same residence on October 3, 2002. Both arsons were committed in retaliation for Mr. and Mrs. Dawson's repeated calls to the police about neighborhood drug dealers, including Brooks.

The case is the result of a joint investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore City Police Department, and the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys John F. Purcell and Jason Weinstein.